



## **Virginia Pollution Prevention Case Study Croc's 19<sup>th</sup> Street Bistro**

### **Project Information**

Croc's 19<sup>th</sup> Street Bistro in Virginia Beach offers coastal cuisine made with local sustainable seafood and local produce from their chef's garden that inspires their seasonal specials. Croc's is committed to environmental excellence and works to minimize environmental impacts whenever possible. As part of this commitment to excellence, Croc's has joined Virginia Green, the Commonwealth of Virginia's campaign to promote environmentally-friendly practices in all aspects of Virginia's tourism industry. Restaurants are an integral part of Virginia's tourism industry and they are the largest sector of Virginia tourism. As such, Virginia Green Restaurants have the opportunity to have a significant impact on how people think about the environment.

### **Environmental Challenges and Opportunities**

When the Virginia Green program was first developed in 2006, Croc's 19<sup>th</sup> Street Bistro became first restaurant to join the program. Croc's already had some of the "core activities" in place, such as minimizing the use of disposable food service products, conserving energy, recycling grease, and using water efficiently, and decided to implement recycling programs for common recyclables in order to complete the qualifications needed to be a Virginia Green partner. When the restaurant started their recycling program they immediately saw cost savings, which led them to seek out more ways to incorporate environmental considerations into their day-to-day operations. The next opportunity that came up was when their interior designer suggested they switch from their old carpet, which they were removing anyway, to new carpet from Interface Flooring that was made from recycled materials and also recyclable at the end of its useful life. Each time a choice had to be made on what to purchase Croc's went for the environmentally friendly option. In the end, the main decision to pursue all of these green initiatives was because the owners wanted to set a good example for their daughters and to do what they could to make the world a better place for everyone.

### **Implementation of the Program**

#### **Building Design & Improvements**

Incorporated into the design of the Bistro are reused building materials and materials from sustainable sources, like the engineered hardwood flooring incorporating farm-raised lumber veneers and man-made substrates. High efficiency dishwashers, toilets, and urinals are in use in addition to low flow restrictors on faucets to conserve water. In addition to installing these operational controls to reduce water use the Bistro also favors dry clean-up methods over water-based methods and has an effective landscape management plan to minimize water use.

Energy bills at the restaurant are tracked and computers, appliances, and other electronic equipment are primarily Energy Star compliant. An Energy Star air conditioning unit has helped increase the Bistro's efficiency as well as natural lighting and high efficiency compact fluorescent light bulbs. Croc's is also the first full service restaurant in the state to have solar hot water heating.

With each new purchase or upgrade that the restaurant makes, environmental considerations are taken into account. The carpet in the restaurant is made up of 45% recycled content, the paint used in the facility is low VOC, and the bar service coolers are Freon-free. Aluminum chairs and tables were purchased to avoid cleaning and refinishing with harmful products. All of these choices were made because they are better for the environment and better for the health of the employees and customers at Croc's.

In addition to the upgrades made to the building itself, additional projects have taken place on the Croc's 19<sup>th</sup> Street Bistro property. First, a bike rack was added to allow for customers to use a more environmentally friendly way to reach the restaurant. More recently, the first Tesla car-charging station at the Virginia Beach Oceanfront was installed at Croc's 19th Street Bistro. Tesla Motors provided two chargers, one for its electric cars and a universal charger for other electric cars, through the company's "destination" charging program. Hotels, restaurants and shopping centers can apply online to receive the devices at no cost. This allows the Bistro's patrons to plug in while they eat. One hour at the Croc's parking lot station provides up to 60 miles of driving energy to the car. The program was suggested to Croc's after a Tesla employee visited the Old Beach Farmers Market in the Croc's parking lot. Croc's joins the Commodore Theatre in Portsmouth and The Founders Inn and Spa in Virginia Beach as the only Tesla destination charging stations in the South Hampton Roads area of Virginia.

### **Waste Reduction**

Croc's Bistro has numerous efforts in place in order to minimize the amount of waste that is sent to landfill. A big factor in reducing waste at restaurants includes inventory control. Effective food inventory control, including a last-in/first-out system, and effective labeling and ordering processes are the first step in waste reduction. Croc's also purchases disposable containers that are compostable, allowing the container to be diverted from the consumer's waste stream when possible.

The restaurant recycles glass, steel cans, aluminum cans, plastic, office paper, toner cartridges, newspaper, cardboard, packing supplies, fluorescent lamps, batteries, and used electronic equipment. In addition to these more common recyclables, Croc's also recycles their cooking grease. The grease is sent to Greenlight Biofuels in Charlottesville, who then sells it to companies that turn it into fuel. All waste is tracked through the Bistro's waste bills, and Croc's has seen a \$200 per month savings from their recycling programs and is also now making money from the recycled grease. The restaurant also donates the excess food from events held at their facility as another method of waste diversion. In addition to diverting waste from landfills, Croc's is always looking for new ways to prevent waste. This includes extensive use of electronic correspondence and forms instead of using paper for printing. Screen-based ordering systems are also helpful to reduce waste from using paper tickets.

### **Green Purchasing**

Restaurants purchase a lot of food, and their purchasing power can have a big influence not only on their suppliers, but also on the consumers. Croc's makes an effort to purchase locally grown, organic, and sustainably grown produce and other foods whenever possible. Sustainable menu items include Sensible Seafood<sup>TM</sup>, organic wines and vodka, and local items as well. The Sensible Seafood<sup>TM</sup> Program promotes ocean-friendly seafood from local and sustainable

sources that are not over-fished or harvested in environmentally destructive ways. The restaurant encourages its suppliers to minimize their packaging and other waste materials to reduce any unnecessary materials from coming into their facility.

In addition to environmentally preferable food products, the restaurant takes sustainability into account for all of its purchases. Recycled content paper towels and toilet paper are purchased for the restrooms as well as bulk eco-foam soap dispensers. Non-bleached napkins and coffee filters are purchased as well. Menus and wine lists are printed on recycled content paper with soy-based inks. The restaurant makes every effort to ensure that customers are aware of the environmentally friendly practices by using the Virginia Green logo on their menu and website in addition to having it on display at the entrance of the Bistro. The Bistro has a garden behind the building that is used for some menu items and servers make a point of informing customers what is growing now and what is fresh as a way to raise awareness.

### Evaluation of the Process

The success of the programs are primarily due to the efforts and promotion of co-owner Laura Habr, a champion for sustainable practices that brought the Bistro to where it is today, as a leader in its field for local and environmentally friendly dining. Croc's became the first restaurant to join Virginia Green and it has not stopped setting the pace since then. The programs were implemented as opportunities arose and there has been regular re-training of the staff when programs or equipment are updated or changed.

Outreach has been a big focus of the restaurant. Croc's has been an integral part of bringing many of these environmentally friendly practices to the Virginia Beach area, helping found the Virginia Beach Green Team. The Green Team works with local hotels, restaurants, and attractions to make them more aware of the economic advantages of recycling. The owners of Croc's Bistro applied for an EPA grant to fund a pilot program for restaurant composting and then worked with the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Museum to enroll Virginia Green restaurants in the effort. After the grant period the program proved to be too costly to continue, but the Bistro still composts coffee grounds for their garden and sends their oyster shells to S.O.S (Save Our Shells), a program run by Lynnhaven River Now that puts the shells back into the water to be a home for new oyster spats.

Sustainable. Organic. Local (S.O.L.) has become the mission of Croc's 19<sup>th</sup> Street Bistro. The Bistro is the gathering place for "Virginia Beach Green Drinks," an informal happy hour held monthly for people who care about the environment. These monthly get-togethers provide an opportunity for the local sustainability community to socialize, network, and learn from one another. Because of the Bistro's active role in the community, the National Restaurant Association recognized Croc's with the Good Neighbor Award for Virginia in 2005 for going above and beyond in giving back to its community. In addition to supporting local businesses the restaurant encourages individuals to do so as well. The bistro's parking lot is home to the Old Beach Farmers Market, which supports family farms, watermen, and Virginia wineries. The Farmers Market is also recognized as a Virginia Green partner.

### Continual Improvement of the Program

Croc's 19<sup>th</sup> Street Bistro is committed to running their business sustainably. They are always looking for ways to continually improve their environmental efforts. They plan to reinvigorate a full-fledged composting program if it becomes cost-effective in their area. The S.O.L. mantra is not only their mission, but has also translated into a purchasing policy, focusing the Bistro's purchasing power on products and upgrades that have the least environmental impact. Every time furniture or equipment is replaced Croc's makes sure to find the most environmentally friendly products that fit their needs. Croc's has also pioneered the "greening" of numerous Virginia Beach community events such as the Virginia Beach Wine Week and Shamrock Marathon.